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THE VIENNA EXHIBITION IN CONNEXION WITH ART-INDUSTRY.*

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IX. FURNITURE.

If we examine the Furniture in the Vienna Exhibition we cannot fail immediately to remark two things, first, the want of repose and stability, the fluctuation of the taste of the day; and secondly, the sudden manifestation of certain new tendencies struggling for the mastery. This is of course true only with regard to civilised states which follow the stream of the times, but these are not the only countries represented in the Exhibition by objects of this sort. The East has now not only contributed objects of domestic furniture, but has erected whole dwellings and separate houses.

In the enceinte of the Exhibition there was a so-called Oriental quarter, consisting of a group of Egyptian buildings with a palatial mansion, a Morocco villa, a Persian building, which however is entirely artificial, and a Turkish residence with some smaller Turkish buildings. Apart from what is nailed and rivetted in these houses, and so does not come under the category of furniture, there is little of interest from our point of view, as it is well known that the all-important parts of oriental furniture consist of woven stuffs, carpets, divans, hangings, &c., of which we have already spoken. Their wood-work is very insignificant. At present indeed it is becoming more important in proportion as the manners and customs of Turkish and Egyptian magnates begin to assimilate to those of Europe. We see a proof of this in the rich drawing room of the Turkish house, in which every chair and sofa is of European type. Similar articles

are also to be seen in the Egyptian department, while the Egyptian palace retains its more genuine and antique appointments. In upright articles of furniture, such as low tables, cabinets and chests of drawers, Turkey exhibits a few covered with a mosaic of mother of pearl, but even these have adopted European forms, and have no special importance or delicacy of execution.

Hence it is only European furniture that claims any great interest for us, and this is exhibited in such perfection with regard to the different countries and their peculiarities, that it leaves us nothing more to be desired in order to form an exact appreciation of its present standpoint. Austria naturally occupies the greatest space, not only because she is at home, and that of course she takes the lion's share, but also because her furniture manufacture is a very important branch of her industry. Next follow France, England, Germany and Italy, and even the smaller states of Denmark and Belgium are well represented. Some few specimens are contributed from Sweden, Spain and Portugal, and some from Russia.

With the exception of Russia, who displays a tendency to give to her more delicate articles of furniture the stamp of the national ornamentation of her wooden houses, all these countries show nothing but the modern type, either according to the till now prevalent French fashion, or to new efforts at Reform. But with what diversity and significance does each country display its peculiarities!

Let us first look at France, which till now has taken the lead in this department of industry just as much as she has done in the world of fashion. In our former notices of other branches of Art-industry, we have often

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had occasion to remark that the present French taste takes its motives from the eighteenth century, and notably from its second half. Thus its furniture, as well as the plastic decorations on doors, walls and ceilings, belongs especially to the style of Louis XV. and Louis XVI. One consequence of this is, that marquetry flourishes in the French cabinet work, just as at the end of the last century, delicately executed and decorated with floral, allegorical, antique and other ornaments of the same kind. The form of these tables, chests, *etagères*, bedsteads and chairs, is for the most part meagre and stiff, and like their models they are often mounted in gilded bronze. Guerre brothers, Göckler, Charmois and Lemarinier and others have contributed a rich selection of such articles. Diehl has more of a speciality, using instead of wood marquetry intarsia of bronze relief, or ivory with paintings and devices.

As formerly, so now, the French, besides the gilt and inlaid furniture in the style of the eighteenth century, have taken up the carved work of the Renaissance period, and execute it with the greatest delicacy, and in the utmost perfection. These last are more adapted to the library, the dining and smoking rooms, while the former, which are specifically French in their genre, are suitable for the drawing room, boudoir and bedroom. The modern French follows thus two directions, one Renaissance, the other Rococo in style, as may be seen in the house of the French Commissioners, which is intended to be a kind of model house. Of these carved articles in the sixteenth century style, which are either black in ebony or in imitation of it, or brown in walnut and oak, there are numerous exhibitors, from whom we may select the names of Fourdinois and Roubillon.

In the same manner the sofas, chairs &c., are divided into their separate styles, but those which belong to the Renaissance are far less numerous and quite distinct in character. Roubillon, and Levy and Worms have some very beautiful specimens. In these there reigns far more freedom and fantasy, and the whims of an evervarying fashion play a much more important part, especially in the upholsterer's department. Hence the chairs or sofas which belong to the period of the eighteenth century, are less severe in their style. Those that come nearest to their models are those which are covered with Gobelins tapestry in figures and landscapes, a kind of decoration, which absurd as it is, has still many representatives in France, as, for example, Braguenié and Duplan. In addition to this, in order to give them a gayer and more variegated appearance, the imitation of the oriental divans is even gaining ground. To this must be attributed all those fauteuils and chairs in which the woodwork is concealed by upholstery and a textile cover. The best specimens of this style are exhibited by Lemoine, Pénon, Lévy and Worms.

Next to the French furniture manufacturers are the Belgian, but their contributions, particularly with regard to their chairs, sofas &c. are not sufficiently numerous to warrant a conclusive judgement. But their articles of upright furniture, beds, cabinets, buffets connected with a panelled wall and carved in oak, display perhaps

a more distinct and decided leaning to the Renaissance of the sixteenth century. In such imitations the French are not true to their models, but transform them according to their own taste; the Belgians, on the contrary, as is also the case with their ecclesiastical art, are faithful imitators of the old style. The chief exhibitors in this branch are Snyers and Rang of Brussels.

A still more decided homage is paid to the Renaissance by the Italians, but their furniture manufacture takes a peculiar standpoint, and is of two distinct kinds, one for the house, the other for art. Of the first, we see but little in the Exhibition, nothing in fact, but a few divans and armchairs covered with silk, remarkable for very unnatural upholstery and entirely of the modern French school; the other kind, which, as we have said, is artistic, is richly represented, and shows only objects remarkable for their carving, their composition, or their workmanship, and which are intended for an artistically appointed house, or for the cabinet. Originally they were produced to satisfy the taste of the antiquarian, being either altogether imitations or exact copies. At present they are considered in general as that which they really are, modern articles of furniture in the Renaissance style, but with a view to apartments appointed *à l'antique*. The manufacture of them has attained a certain importance through the agency of dealers by whom the business is chiefly carried on, and several cities, especially Venice, Milan, Florence, Siena and Rome have a great trade in this branch.

In style and *technique* the several kinds of the old Italian wood furniture are well represented. In foremost rank as to number stand the buffets, cabinets, chimney-pieces, frames, bedsteads, &c., which as to their style represent the whole Renaissance period, from its early flat ornamentation and severe composition to the solid and naturalistic alto relievo of the Rococo. All is produced in a vigorous and masterly style, sometimes rude and with a certain daring, by which the Italian works are characteristically distinguished from the tame and highly ornamental productions of the French. The principal exhibitors are Frullini, M. Guggenheim, Morini, Panciera, Truci, and Ferri and Bertolozzi.

The second rank must be assigned to the marquetry, especially to the ebony specimens inlaid with ivory, in which the modern Italians display the same perfection of workmanship as their predecessors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though the design and delicacy of form do not always attain the same point. There are many excellent specimens in the Exhibition, of which we may select for notice those by Pozzi of Rome and Pogliani of Milan. The wood marquetry is of an inferior quality, and is especially defective in design. A third or fourth kind is seen in the cabinets of ebony with stones of different colours and gilt ornaments and figures in bronze, such as were produced in the seventeenth century for the art-collections and mansions of princes. An excellent specimen of this kind of work has been contributed to the Exhibition from Guggenheim's Art-institute in Venice.

The German furniture also, as represented in the Exhibition, shows a very decided leaning to the Renaissance, enhanced by conventionalised wall-decorations. There are some companies, as in Berlin and Breslau, and some private firms as Heininger's in Mainz, Stövesand in Carlsruhe, who expressly devote themselves to the Renaissance style. They exhibit single pieces, whole suites, and even rooms with wainscoating. In these we recognise a double progress, first in the direction of Art, and secondly in their freedom from French taste and hitherto prevailing fashion. Most of these German works are good in their tendency, and several are very successful in an artistic point of view, but in general they suffer from too great stiffness, as if designed with a view to architectural display. The same defect exists in the fully furnished apartments as we see them in the German compartment; they have a very creditable look, but they are altogether without gracefulness or comfort. Much of the poor impression they produce is due however to the defective arrangement of the German department, in which all æsthetic considerations have been overlooked.

The Austrian furniture, and particularly that of Vienna displays in numerous specimens the same tendency as the German, but with better success. The Austrian exhibition is very comprehensive, and gives in itself a good idea of all the oscillations and opposing tendencies which now reign in this branch of Art-industry. We find among them many failures, especially with regard to the upholstery, much of which still shows the obsolete French standpoint. They even hang the walls with thick silk covered cushions, as if to hinder the visitors from running their heads against the wall; they cover floors and walls with carpets and paper hangings representing basket work, they decorate whatever can be decorated with a dull grey, together with many other absurdities of the same kind. Among them, however, are some works of great beauty, by sculptors, decorators, furniture manufacturers and cabinetmakers, as Schönthaler, Fr. O. Schmidt, Dübeler, Ludwig and several others; also many charming models of rooms by the above named, and before all by Philip Haas and Sons. Just what we look for in vain among the Germans, the union of a certain poetical charm and comfort, with elegance and beauty, we find in a high degree in the Vienna exhibitors. The best and most perfect specimen is beyond all question the Austrian Imperial pavilion, the interior decoration and appointments of which have been executed from the ideas and designs of Storck. If we inquire after the artistic tendency of the Austrian furniture, a great part of it seems to be as it were groping in the dark, but still there comes out with more and more distinctness, from the chaos of the different styles and ideas, a modern and freely treated Renaissance. To this belong all the works of a higher character, and they are by no means few in number. Corresponding to it also carved work plays a great part in the Austrian furniture, especially in frames for mirrors and pictures which seem to be on the point of giving up their old ways, and returning to the same direction in point of style. In this respect the Vienna manufactory

of Ullrich jun. has the preeminence. Together with carving marquetry work is also more extensively used in its application to furniture, not so much in the style of Louis XVI., as is the case with the French work, as with a leaning to older models.

The English furniture is less distinct in its artistic tendency. Since the commencement of the efforts at reform in the matter of taste it has in every way entirely changed its character. Formerly rude and clumsy, it is now especially distinguished by the delicacy of its form and ornaments; formerly priding itself on the costliness and solidity of the material it has now become more agreeable to the eye, with inlaid work of coloured woods and ivory. The English specimens of this kind, as well as those in ivory, with black or red designs of flowers, emblematical devices and figures rather in the style of Louis XVI., are, as to their workmanship, among the most beautiful and most perfect productions in the whole Exhibition. Cooper and Holt, Walker, Morant, Holland and Sons, Jackson and Graham seem to have endeavoured to outvie one another. There is also a second point to be noticed in these articles of furniture which must be considered as a rational progress in modern Gothic. It is well known that, within the last twenty or thirty years, the English have built or restored many gothic mansions and fitted them up in the same style. But their architects of the present day have arrived at a due estimation of that mistaken kind of gothic furniture which founds its claims to style and beauty on the architectonic adjuncts of buttresses, pinnacles, pillars, arches and tracery, and have restricted themselves to the rational and especially the constructive principle which pervades the furniture of the middle ages. Instead of carved work, rich articulation and prominent profiling, they keep to a more picturesque ornamentation either by a modest marquetry, by colouring the incisions, or by the introduction of miniature pictures or painted porcelain. There are several specimens of this kind of English furniture to be seen in the Exhibition, by Morant, Collinson and Lock; the most important of all is a side-board by Cooper and Holt.

Although the English furniture has not moved in the same direction of reform as the German, Austrian and Italian, it has still made a grand step in advance as to its artistic importance, and so takes its part in that great progress of taste in all branches of art-industry to which our Exhibition bears the most undoubted testimony. Although much still goes on in the old ways, and blindly follows the worn out traces of French taste; although there is much groping in the dark, and many mistakes brought to light, still we see that, by the interchange of ideas, fashions and styles a new and more distinct direction has been given to taste, which no country, not even France, can ignore; a direction which, though it may found itself on ancient models, we may pronounce to be independent and peculiar to the second half of the nineteenth century. Success seems already assured to it. And this result must unquestionably be attributed to the museums and the efforts generated by them.